

## **It Pays to Know the Difference Between Urgent Care and the Emergency Room**

Choosing the appropriate type of care for your medical condition accomplishes several important things, including:

- choosing the appropriate level of treatment for your medical condition
- making the best use of your time by selecting your medical care wisely
- ensuring highly specialized, expensive emergency room resources are used efficiently

### **Urgent Care –**

If a condition arises and you do not feel it can wait until you can schedule an appointment with your Primary Care Manager (PCM), urgent care may be an appropriate choice for you. You should always contact your PCM before deciding to go to urgent care. You can contact your PCM during regular office hours or request a referral to urgent care after hours by calling (623) 856-2273. Your PCM can assist you over the phone and help you decide on the most appropriate medical resource. Staff at urgent care centers cannot answer medical questions or advise you over the phone. In general, if the illness or injury is something you'd normally see your PCM for but you can't get an appointment right away or it's after hours, urgent care is the right choice. Some reasons your PCM may direct you to go to an Urgent Care Center are:

- Minor lacerations
- Asthma
- Bites, animal or insect
- Migraine headaches
- Vomiting
- Rising fever

### **Hospital Emergency Room -**

TRICARE defines an emergency as a medical, maternity, or psychiatric condition that would lead a “prudent lay person” (*someone with average knowledge of health and medicine*) to believe that a serious medical condition exists, or that the absence of immediate medical attention would result in a threat to life, limb, or eyesight, or when the person has painful symptoms requiring immediate attention to relieve suffering. This includes situations where a person is in severe pain or is at immediate risk to self or others.

An emergency room is prepared to treat life threatening illnesses and injuries 24/7. The emergency department sees patients in order of priority, based on the seriousness of their conditions. If you use the ER for non-emergency conditions, you may have to wait for a prolonged period of time. It's important to keep hospital emergency departments open for true emergencies.

If someone is unconscious, having trouble breathing, has suffered a serious injury, or may be having a heart attack, **call 9-1-1 immediately**. Do not try to drive yourself, or anyone else, to the hospital if the condition appears serious. Paramedics who respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls are specifically trained to stabilize emergency patients and coordinate their care with the most appropriate hospital emergency department for their treatment. In a life-threatening situation or if you are experiencing a serious medical condition, go directly to the nearest emergency room. Inform the emergency room staff of your PCM's name so they can better coordinate your care. Some examples of serious medical conditions or symptoms requiring emergency care are:

- Severe bleeding
- Chest pains
- No pulse
- Inability to breathe
- Spinal cord or back injury
- Severe eye injuries
- Broken bones

By making prudent choices when seeking treatment at an urgent care clinic or a hospital Emergency Room, you are saving yourself money in the long run and being a good steward of our precious medical resources. For more information about your TRICARE benefits, please visit [www.TriWest.com](http://www.TriWest.com) or call 1-888-874-9378.